EARLY SUCCESSIONAL HABITAT DEVELOPMENT/MANAGEMENT

(acre)
CODE 647

Natural Resources Conservation Service
Conservation Practice Standard

I. Definition

Manage early plant succession to benefit desired wildlife or natural communities.

II. Purpose

- Increase plant community diversity.
- Provide wildlife or aquatic habitat for early successional species.
- Provide habitat for declining species.

III. Conditions Where Practice Applies

On all lands that are suitable for the kinds of wildlife and plant species that are desired.

IV. Criteria

A. General Criteria

1. Early succession management will be designed to achieve the desired plant community in density, vertical and horizontal structure, and plant species diversity and composition.

2. Methods used will be designed to maintain soil erosion quality criteria and water quality criteria.

3. Adapted, native plant materials will be used for planting and encouraged through succession whenever possible, but introduced species may be appropriate depending upon objectives.

4. If necessary, vegetative manipulation to maximize plant and animal diversity can be accomplished by practices including prescribed burning, light disking, mowing, prescribed grazing, spraying, interplanting, or a combination of the above.

a. Prescribed Burning - Use Prescribed Burning (338) to remove excess litter, which can reduce the quality of wildlife habitat. Controlled fire can allow germination of seed bearing annuals, increase plant species diversity, control unwanted woody cover, and open up the stand for movement of small animals and birds.

b. Light Disking - Light disking (2-4 inches deep) of existing stands may be necessary to increase the amount of open ground and encourage a diverse plant community of annual and perennial plants. Disk between October 1 and April 30. Alternate disked strips (less than or equal to 75 feet wide) with buffer strips (2 times the disked width) across the field on contour/cross-slope. Rotate the disked strips across the field.

c. Mowing - Annual mowing or mowing of entire stands is discouraged since it greatly decreases plant diversity, and reduces residual cover available for the following nesting season. All mowed residues will be thoroughly shredded to prevent excess litter accumulation. If mowing is necessary, two options are available. Mow between August 1 and August 31 to protect ground nesting wildlife and allow residual growth. Mow no more than one-third of the field and rotate mowed strips across the filed. Mow cool season grasses no shorter than 6 inches. Mow native grass/forbs no shorter than 10 inches.

d. A second option for mowing would be strip mowing in the spring. Mowing between March 15 and May 1 will be

most compatible with wildlife without greatly impacting ground nesting activities or loss of fall food plants. Mow no more than one-third of the field every year. Rotate mowed strips across the field every year.

e. Prescribed Grazing - Use prescribed grazing to manipulate plant succession, reduce ground litter, and provide dusting areas. Livestock can be beneficial to maintaining the quality of herbaceous cover and controlling invasive plants when managed in accordance with a grazing plan with a specific habitat management objective. This technique requires close supervision to ensure the site is not over-grazed.

f. Spraying - Use selective herbicides to manipulate plant succession and improve habitat diversity. Herbicides may be used to reduce competition for desired or planted species. Careful planning and care in application are required in the use of chemicals to improve existing habitat. Selection of a product should be based on several factors including product effectiveness, non-target species impacts, toxicological risks, and off-site movement of chemicals.

g. Interplanting - Interplanting of desired species either as plants or seeds may be necessary to achieve the desired plant composition. Planting plants or seeds into an existing stand is always difficult and will require the use of one or more of the above mentioned plant management techniques in order to have any chance for success.

5. Measures must be provided to control severe outbreaks of noxious weeds and other invasive species in order to comply with state noxious weed laws.

6. Grassland Habitat Criteria

a. Management practices and activities are not to disturb cover during the primary nesting period for grassland species. Exceptions are allowed for periodic burning or mowing when necessary to maintain the health of the plant community. Mowing may be needed during the plant establishment period to control weeds.

b. To benefit insect food sources for grassland nesting birds, spraying or other control of noxious weeds will be done on a “spot” basis to protect forbs and legumes that benefit native pollinators and other wildlife.

V. Considerations

This practice may need to be applied periodically to maintain the desired early successional plant community.

Early successional treatments should be rotated throughout the managed area.

Managing for early successional plant communities is beneficial if not essential for less mobile animal species. The less mobile the species, the more important to provide all the habitat requirements in a small area.

Design and install the treatment layout to best facilitate operation of all machinery used on the strips or to make easily controlled burning boundaries. Whenever possible, lay out strips to have some multiple or full width passes by all farm implements.

Grazing may be used as a management tool to achieve the intended purpose of this practice. A grazing plan is required.

VI. Plans And Specifications

Specifications for this practice shall be prepared for each site. Specifications shall be recorded using approved specifications sheets, job sheets, narrative statements in the conservation plan, or other acceptable documentation.

VII. Operation And Maintenance

An operation and maintenance plan shall be developed that is consistent with the purposes of this practice, its intended life, and the criteria for its design.

This practice may be used to promote the conservation of declining species, including threatened and endangered (plant, wildlife or aquatic) species.

This practice will be inspected periodically and restored as needed, to maintain the stated purpose. Additional operation and maintenance requirements will be developed on a site-specific basis to assure performance of the practice as intended